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ABSTRACT

The Kindergarten Oral Language Project (KOLP) is a program of the Los Angeles (California) Unified School District. The program is based on Teaching Activities for Language Knowledge and is designed to improve oral language skills of the kindergarten population, identify students at risk for language and speech problems, and decrease incidences of special education placement. The language and speech specialist works cooperatively with the kindergarten teacher in delivering language lessons in the classroom. The program's philosophy emphasizes the assumption that early intervention will increase oral language competency in the "at risk" population and that oral language competency is the basis for language-related skills and higher level processing. The paper describes the development and implementation of KOLP, its support system, staff development, and evaluation. Includes 13 references. (JDD)

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LANGUAGE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR THE KINDERGARTEN POPULATION

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Introduction

The Kindergarten Oral Language Project is a language intervention model utilized within the Los Angeles Unified School District. It is designed to increase and improve oral language skills of the kindergarten population, identify students at risk for language and speech services and decrease incidences of special education placement. In this project the language and speech specialist works cooperatively with the kindergarten teacher in delivering language lessons in the kindergarten classroom.

Needs Assessment

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is located in a major urban metropolis and is the nation's second largest school district. As in most urban school districts, LAUSD is experiencing a constant increase in the diversity of its students. The school populations continue, each year, to become more pluralistic in culture, ethnicity, and linguistic and economic backgrounds. According to the LAUSD 1989 Racial/Ethnic Survey, the District's current enrollment is primarily Hispanic. This survey confirms a twenty-two (22) year trend. In 1966, when the District compiled its first survey, Hispanic students made up 18.6% of the total enrollment, Anglo students totaled 56.1% and Black students were at 21.4%.

LAUSD 1989 Racial/Ethnic Survey

59%	Hispanic
16.7%	Black
15.8%	Anglo
5.9%	Asian
1.9%	Philippino
.5%	Pacific Islander
.2%	American Indian

It has been observed at district and county levels that many students are not communicating effectively in the classroom. Teachers at local school sites report that students are not achieving the desired success in reading. Referrals for special education intervention and the number of students enrolled in Special Day Classes and receiving Language and Speech Service are continuing to increase.

Received LAS Services

1985	14,270
1986	14,696
1987	14,760
1988	15,300

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Enrolled in Special Day Classes	
1985	7,081
1986	7,708
1987	7,938

Typically, those students referred for language and speech services are the same students who encounter difficulty in reading. Maxwell and Wallach, in 1984, and Weiner, in 1985, reported that children with a history of language and speech impairments experienced difficulties learning to read, and students with reading disorders were found to have deficits in oral language. Deficit areas included poor vocabulary, deficiencies in morphology and syntax and difficulties in comprehension of syntactic structures.

LAUSD skill tests have reflected decreased or depressed reading and language scores in comparison to public schools throughout California. In 1987-1988 the District reading scores of the California Test of Basic Skills were in the thirty-three percentile for grade 1, twenty-eight percentile for grade 2 and thirty-three percentile for grade 3. These scores were approximately the same as those of the previous year.

Philosophy

The research in the areas of language and reading indicates a need for language intervention at the elementary school level and allows two (2) assumptions to be made. The first assumption is that early intervention will increase oral language competency in the "at risk" population. In a 1988 review of studies of intervention with at risk early childhood and early school age children, Elizabeth Gray concluded that three (3) factors will increase intervention success: 1) complementing the child's oral language goals; 2) creating favorable language environments; 3) increasing student's awareness of word parts (metalinguistics). (Favorable environment includes opportunities to share questions or react, interact and use language as it is learned and to use language for a variety of reasons and audiences.)

The second assumption that oral language competency is the basis for language related skills and higher level processing is a relatively new idea. Research began in the seventies into the relationship between reading disorders and linguistic processes and with what is called the linguistic basis for reading, writing and spelling. To restate the latter, reading depends upon oral language competency. Writing is a more complex task, depending on analytical skills and the use of previously learned language and reading skills. Wallach and Butler, Wiig and Semel and Gruenwald and Pollach have discussed this topic. The latter states "We, working with language and language disorders have

long known that language content and concepts underlie the learning of all academic tasks." Sanger, Strick and Lange, 1986 describe a successful study in which an integrated reading/language program was used with children displaying reading difficulties. The teachers in the study reported that they considered retelling stories and defining words the most beneficial activities in the program.

Development of the Kindergarten Oral Language Project

The history of the Kindergarten Oral Language Project is only four (4) years old. The low reading and language scores and increased special education referrals resulted in state and district priority to increase oral language skill. In response to the California State Superintendent of School's call for experimental language intervention programs by language and speech specialists, the Kindergarten Oral Language Project was initiated within LAUSD.

Beginning February 1986 this innovative Kindergarten Oral Language Project (KOLP) was introduced in eight (8) target kindergarten classes located in eight (8) schools and has grown into several hundred classes in seventy-eight (78) schools with sixty-five (65) language and speech (LAS) specialists participating.

Initially, a search began for a program within the District that would be appropriate. Several excellent programs and materials were found that were later incorporated into the KOLP, but a program that would require a minimum of preparation time was needed. This requirement was found in an excellent program being used within a school district located in Thousand Oaks, California, which is a small suburban area about thirty miles from Los Angeles with a primarily middle class population (totally different from LAUSD). The program was entitled Teaching Activities for Language Knowledge (T.A.L.K.). It had been developed in Rockford, Illinois under a U.S. Department of Education grant and is now in the National Dissemination Network. It is necessary to apply and to agree to certain stipulations in order to obtain and use the T.A.L.K. program.

In the T.A.L.K. program the LAS specialist and kindergarten teacher jointly plan and teach two half hour oral language lessons per week with the LAS specialist modeling effective strategies and techniques and serving as a language resource. The teacher independently teaches two follow-up lessons during the week. Each half hour lesson includes a formal beginning and ending. The lessons can consist of review material or can be a presentation of new concepts. A physical activity is usually included due to the difficulty of kindergarten children being able to sit and concentrate for a half hour period.

After submitting the T.A.L.K. application, a one day in-service was conducted by a certified T.A.L.K. trainer and then the program commenced in LAUSD. T.A.L.K. includes a group of excellent highly

motivating lessons from kindergarten to third grade in the areas of Personal-Social Awareness, Listening Skills, Rhythm and Prosody Grammatical Skills and Cognitive Skills. Initially it was thought that all of the District's language and language based reading skills could be taught with the program. However, it was soon apparent that LAUSD required a more comprehensive oral language program than that which T.A.L.K. offered. For example, the first lesson categorization in T.A.L.K. makes the assumption that the student has previously acquired the concept of categorization and knows what foods, toys and clothing are. Many of the students seen in KOLP rarely have either the concept or the vocabulary of the categories.

Consequently, a small book of supplementary lessons was developed along with adding three materials entitled "Sesame Street Yellow Book," "Jazz Chants" and "Classroom Listening and Speaking" (CLAS). A curriculum based on the District's language and reading goals and other added goals in the areas of semantic, pragmatics and metalinguistics was also developed. Later, these goals were re-arranged in a comprehensive curriculum that includes the goals, suggested lessons, and supplemental materials. This has proved valuable as a guide to a hierarchical progression of kindergarten skills. Finally, teaching strategies were developed to maximize each child's oral language participation.

Implementation

Three procedures are used to select KOLP school sites. 1) The language and speech specialists who are interested in implementing the program are encouraged to speak with the principals at their assigned schools. The principals then contact an Administrative Specialist from the Language and Speech Program. 2) An Administrative Specialist from the Language and Speech Program contacts a school principal directly regarding the nature of the program and how it could be of benefit to the kindergarten population at the school site. 3) There are eight regular education regions within LAUSD. Each region has a Director of Instruction. These administrators are continually informed of new and innovative District projects. Often, a Director of Instruction will suggest the KOLP to a school principal.

In each of these procedures the Administrative Specialist provides the principal with an in-depth project description and explains project commitment, which includes selecting a participating teacher and purchasing the basic materials.

Support System

A four person Consultant Team is provided for the KOLP. The consultants conduct observational visits to participating classes, confer with and assist LAS specialists and kindergarten teachers, including assisting them with any implementation methods and

procedures. The consultants also "troubleshoot" any difficulties or problems occurring during the operation of the project at schools sites and serve as a resource to schools.

The Consultant Team provides presentations regarding the KOLP within the District and for local, state and national organizations and agencies. The team also works jointly to facilitate the operation of KOLP within the District, which includes - conducting the initial in-service training for the LAS specialists and kindergarten teachers participating in the project and conducting research and obtaining appropriate materials for the project in the form of supplementary manuals/materials, audio and video tapes, reference books, etc.

In addition to having a Consultant Team, an Administrative specialist is responsible for the overall operation of KOLP as well as coordinating all the efforts of the Consultant Team and functioning as the liaison to other District administrators.

Staff Development

On-going staff development training is provided for the participating LAS specialists through periodic Cluster Meetings, at which guest speakers may be featured. The topics for these meetings are based upon the needs of the KOLP LAS specialists; i.e., Classroom Behavior Management.

Maintenance

One of the ultimate goals of the KOLP is to train each of the kindergarten teachers in the participating school and for those teachers to function as the implementor of the project within the classroom. Therefore, as the school year proceeds the kindergarten teacher assumes increasing responsibility for the project operation. The following year the kindergarten teacher is expected to implement the KOLP independently while the LAS specialist works with a newly trained kindergarten teacher.

A Maintenance Formula was developed to insure the continuity of the KOLP. At the beginning of the new school year the LAS specialist returns to the previous year's class to assist in the reinitiation of the KOLP. Scheduling time for this classroom contact is provided by eliminating one lesson per month from the current participating class.

Evaluation

At this time two forms of evaluation are utilized. 1) Each participating kindergarten teacher is asked to complete a checklist of language behaviors for the students in the classroom.

This process is conducted at the beginning and end of the school year. The items contained on the checklist were abstracted from a similar scale developed by the University of California, at Los Angeles's (UCLA) Prediction and Prevention Project. The post evaluations on the checklists have consistently indicated significant progress. 2) Rating Scale Evaluations are distributed at the end of each school year to participating kindergarten teacher LAS specialists and administrators. To date there has been overwhelming approval and satisfaction with the Kindergarten Oral Language Project.

Summary

The number of participating KOLP sites continue to expand each school year due to the requests of administrators, teachers and LAS specialists. To date three hundred eighty-nine (389) kindergarten teachers and eighty-five (85) LAS specialists have been trained. Enhancing oral language skills is a major area of emphasis in Los Angeles Unified School District, especially for grades kindergarten through three. It is felt that the Kindergarten Oral Language Project is a positive and appropriate way to address the needs of the students and, in addition, it further utilizes the skills and expertise of the regular education kindergarten teacher and the special education LAS specialist in a "partnership" format.

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